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USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE · OFFICE OF INFORMATION · WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

November 1966 No. 35

BOOKS AND BOOKLETS

Protecting Our Food. That's the title of the 1966 Yearbook of Agriculture--a big book that tells about the big job that's being done in safeguarding our food supply from the farmer's field to the saucepan on the stove. America's food abundance didn't just happen, Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman points out. "We have to fight 10,000 kinds of insects for our food, 1,500 plant diseases and 250 animal diseases. We have to fight spoilage and decay." The story of how men and women in 500 different occupations do this job is told in the new yearbook. If you'd like a copy, write to your Senator or Representative. Each has a limited number of yearbooks for free distribution. Or, you can buy "Protecting Our Food" from the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, for $2.50.

Guard Against Plant Pests. As the drive to beautify America continues, many people are exchanging plants, trees, and shrubs. Many countries abroad are offering them as gestures of friendship. Before accepting any such offers, be sure you and your community check plant quarantine regulations. The plant you get may bring with it a disastrous epidemic to some basic food or fiber crop. A letter-size leaflet explains how plant quarantines work. You may have a free copy of "Guard Against Plant Pests" by writing to the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Ask for PA-725.

How to Buy Eggs. Most people know eggs are a good buy. Few know just how good. Did you, for example, realize that when you pay 60 cents a dozen for large eggs, you're paying only 40 cents a pound--a very reasonable price for protein. You'll find this bit of information--and lots more--in "How to Buy Eggs," a new leaflet by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Single copies may be obtained free from the Office of Information, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Please request on a postcard.

Food Costs. Where the consumer food dollar goes--what proportion to the producer, the processor, the distributor--is explained in this 16-page booklet published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The publication also shows the major trends through 1965 in farm and retail prices for food, marketing charges, and the relation between food costs and consumer income. To get a copy of the booklet, send 10 cents to the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Ask for "Food Costs," MP-856.

ON TV

Ballad of Smokey the Bear. Thanksgiving day will be a big day for Smokey the Bear--and for you, too. He'll appear on network television twice! In the morning, Smokey will amble down Broadway in the Macy parade. That evening, he'll appear in "The Ballad of Smokey the Bear." Produced in brilliant color, the hour-long fantasy may be seen on NBC-TV from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. EST and PST, from 5:30 to 6:30 MST, and 6:30 to 7:30 CST.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Chop, Chop. A helicopter with a giant arm that reaches out and snips branches from trees! It sounds straight out of science fiction. It's not. It's for real--a new method used by U.S. Department of Agriculture foresters to obtain samples to check insect and disease damage. As the chopper hovers low, a pole-pruner lops off a sample branch and slides it back along the fuselage to the operator. The job is done quickly and efficiently. And it beats climbing the tree or shooting off a branch with a rifle--which is how samples used to be taken.

At Last. Cotton fabrics can now be given a permanent press that lasts--and lasts--and lasts. There's never been much trouble in putting the press in wash-and-wear or in keeping it there. The problem has been in its wearability. Now, a new finishing method developed by U.S. Department of Agriculture research gives permanent creases in cotton fabrics twice the life they used to have. It involves a two-step process that first locks the chemicals in the fabric (for more abrasion resistance), then puts in the wash-and-wear. Pants cuffs made of cotton sateen and treated with the experimental process can withstand twice as many washings as those treated by currently used methods. The scientists don't exactly know why it all happens. But they're glad it does.

Pea-Pickin'. Pea processors--those who can and freeze cowpeas, blackeye peas and field peas--can now separate the young from the old by giving the peas a "sieve-and-swim" test developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A sieve is used to pick out the peas by sizes. Then, just to make sure some old shriveled peas haven't sneaked through, the processor drops the peas into a brine solution. Those that float are the pick of the pack; those that don't are discarded. For you, the consumer, all of this will mean Southern peas of a more uniform size, young, tender, and more nutritious. Unlike garden peas, blackeye peas and cowpeas have not previously been size-graded and quality-separated.

Virile Viruses. If there's illness in your family--such as, smallpox or polio--there's a good chance the viruses will hang around a long time to possibly infect other members of the household. In recent USDA tests, polio virus persisted more than 5 months on woolen blankets, 1-2 months on cotton sheets, but only 5 weeks or less on bath towels and wash cloths. Smallpox virus survived up to 2 months on cotton sheets and terry cloth fabric and 4 1/2 months on woolen blankets. The survival times were influenced by relative humidity. Further research is now needed to find out how to eliminate these viruses more quickly.

LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Greenhouses on the Moon. It's not so wild a dream. The first U.S. space men on the moon are scheduled to bring back 50 pounds of rock and soil. If U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists find it will grow plants, they say there's no reason why greenhouses with artificial atmosphere cannot be used to grow food on the moon.

GREENSPAN

Outdoor Education Center. Youngsters in Chelsea, Mich., will soon be embarking upon a new educational experience. They'll be studying outdoors as well as in. And it's all because of Greenspan, the U.S. Department of Agriculture program that helps turn cropland into recreation and nature study areas. Chelsea, Mich., is buying 56 acres of farm land, 8 of these with the aid of Federal Funds from Greenspan. A new junior high school will be built and the surrounding acres developed into an outdoor laboratory with nature trails, a 1-acre wildlife pond, a wildlife feeding area, camping and winter sports areas. Although Greenspan aid amounted to only $1,834 to the school district, it was enough to tip the scales toward a public improvement that otherwise would not have been possible.

FOOD FACTS

Pick the Plentifuls. This month you'll find lots of turkeys and raisins at your grocery store--plus big supplies of grapes, pears, pork and dry beans. In December, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has broiler-fryers, canned salmon, grapes, raisins, pork, and pears on its Plentiful Foods List.

That Thanksgiving Turkey. Turkey's not only timely, it's an excellent buy this month. If you can use it, buy a large turkey--one 16 pounds or more. You'll find it will cost less per pound, and there's more meat in proportion to bone. But, U.S. Department of Agriculture food economists warn, don't buy big unless your family will eat it all--now or later. No food is a bargain if it ends up in the garbage can.

Misleading Labels. The label that deceives rather than describes is nothing new. The 1928 Yearbook of Agriculture points a critical finger at manufacturers who use containers designed to "blind the eye" and "labels so ornate and so designed to appeal to our sense of the aesthetic rather than our common sense." It shows a large false-sided bottle of vanilla extract beside a smaller, straight-sided bottle that contains twice as much. The author urged consumers to "read" the label. "Sharp eyes," she said, "will prove a distinct advantage to the buyer."...How true. Even today--almost 40 years later.

The Man Who Came to Lunch. An unexpected guest for lunch--and within an hour. There was nothing the manager of the Wilmington, Del., school lunch program could do about it but serve the noonday meal as planned. And she couldn't have done better. The guest, the maitre d' at one of the city's finest hotels, liked what he ate. His comments: The creamed beef was "good," but the toast cups in which it was served could have been browned a little more. The coleslaw was good; so was the chocolate pudding--and "enough for a meal." His conclusion: "For 30 cents, it's wonderful!"

PESTICIDE LABELING

"Danger." Within a month or so, you'll see words of warning big and clear on the labels of all pesticides shipped across State lines. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Federal agency in charge of pesticide labeling, is providing more protection to pesticide users. In the future, the front label on all pesticides must bear the words "Keep out of the reach of children" plus a signal word such as "Danger," "Warning," or "Caution." The new rules also prohibit the use of unwarranted claims for safety. For example, statements such as "Nonpoisonous," "Noninjurious" or "Harmless" will not be allowed on the label--even with such qualifying phrases as "when used as directed."

HOUSE AND HOME

Home for Thanksgiving. Twenty-two Alaskan families living in remote Barrow will celebrate this Thanksgiving in warm, new homes. The prefabricated houses--shipped by freighter from Seattle--have been specially designed to keep out the harsh cold of the region. They are being erected on pilings to avoid the effects of permafrost. Because pipes cannot be laid (again because of the permafrost) each house will have an independent water system and waste disposal facility. A 20-gallon gas water heater melts blocks of ice for the household water supply. A gas-fired furnace supplies heat. Fiberglass insulation in the floor, walls and roof keeps the house comfortable in temperatures which average 35 degrees below zero in winter and seldom more than 65 in the summer. The Barrow houses are the first major effort toward bringing new and improved housing to Alaskan natives living in remote areas of the State. They are financed by loans advanced to the natives by USDA.

Smoke Gets in Your Eyes. Is your fireplace too young to smoke? If it is, yet does, check your house as well as the fireplace. New calking and weatherstripping techniques can make a house so tight there's not enough air to provide the draft the fire needs. So when you light the fire, poof! The draft down the chimmey takes over and drives the smoke into the room. If you open a window--only an inch or two--this will solve the problem, says "Consumers All," the U.S. Department of Agriculture yearbook. The open window will let in enough oxygen to make the fire burn satisfactorily--and there's no smoke.

Wheat for What? City and suburban home builders may soon be planting wheat in housing developments--to provide a temporary cover to keep soil from washing away during construction. Wheat and Sudangrass, U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists say, offer better protection than the perennial grasses now used. And they can be planted any time of the year--Sudangrass in warm weather; wheat in the cool season. Agronomists at Oklahoma State University recently tested Sudangrass in spillways. Within a week after planting, it protected the soil from water erosion. At 2 1/2 inches, the Sudangrass could take a flow equivalent of 1 inch of runoff per hour from a 1,000 foot strip--without soil damage.

Keep It Cool. Planning to install a waste disposer--or do you already have one? Either way, you'll be interested in this tip from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Be sure to run the cold water tap while operating the grinder. The water carries away the waste. The cold solidifies fats so that they may be chopped up and flushed away. If you use hot water, melted fat goes down the drain where it congeals to coat and clog the pipes.

NEW LEGISLATION

Child Nutrition Act. It's a long time till lunch--for the child who comes to school hungry. And many schools don't even offer lunch. To close this nutrition gap in a country of food abundance, the Congress passed and President Johnson on October 12 signed the Child Nutrition Act. The new legislation is designed to: (1) provide kitchen equipment for schools in low-income areas; (2) offer nutritious breakfasts to hungry children; (3) extend the Special Milk Program another 3 years; (4)offer lunch and breakfast to pre-school youngsters enrolled in any regular school system.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Jeanne S. Park, Editor, SERVICE, Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 20250.